Leonardo Padilla
Pomona, Calif.,
August 15, 1957

I know how these people think, even though I am from a different social class, you know. They are mostly all the lower class type of person -- farm laborers, almost all. I'm not saying anything against them, you understand. It's just that they never had the opportunity.

The big problem with Mexico is that the people are ignorant. It's not their fault. It is the fault of the government. I've lived down there almost all my life, and I know what I'm talking about. The government doesn't care about the people. The government cares only about what it can get. You go to Mexico City, and you can always tell who the people with influence in the government are. They are riding around in cars with chauffeurs, and they are not like cars you see around here -- like Cadillacs. Oh, no. They're not good enough for them. They have custom built cars. Oh, it makes me so mad sometimes. They are multimillionaires, and why? Because somebody tapped them and said, "How would you like to be minister of this or that?" This has been going on ever since 1910. There has never been a free election in Mexico. One bunch is just as bad as another bunch, because the second bunch is always picked by the first bunch. Look at Alemán -- one of the biggest crooks in the world. You think Ruiz Cortinez is any better? How could he be? He was handpicked by Alemán. The P.R.I. says, "Okay, you're going to be the next President. Here's so many millions of pesos to run your publicity campaign, etc. You can tell 'way in advance who has been picked, just by reading the newspapres and magazines and seeing who gets the most writeups.

I love my country. Don't get me wrong. But there's no reason why you can't criticize someone you love, is there? It's the same way about these braceros. There's a lot of things they don't know, or do right. They have a long way to go. But they're my brothers, just like you who were born in the United States still feel that the Germans and the English and all those are your brothers. Is it not right?

Now, as far as healthis concerned, let me tell you. There are all types. It takes all kinds to make a world, like they say. But I will say one thing: everybody would like to advance, to progress. You ask them if they would like sanitary plumbing in their villages, and they are going to say, "si." I don't care who they are or where they are from. Oh, sure, there will be a few. You will find them everywhere. Maybe I should say 98% instead of 100%.

Down in Mexico, you know, they are very poor. There are lots and lots of farmers who are still paying their workers maybe 8 pesos a day. That's less than a dollar. It should be a crime, but they are getting away with it. The result -- well, you try it. You have a wife, and five or six kids, and maybe your mother and father to support. You mustn't forget the mother and father. Well, on that kind of money you will probably be able to have only one meal a day. That is very common in Mexico. And that one meal will be very simple. No meat. No fruit. No milk. Just frijoles and chiles. Maybe tortillas if they are lucky.

Now, speaking of the father and the mother, this is very important. We love our parents in Mexico. We have a feeling in our hearts for them that you don't have so much in the United States. I'll tell you what I mean from my own experience. I had some job offers here a few years ago. Very good offers. If I told you what they were, you'd say, "Man, you crazy." But I turned them down. Why? Because I heard my mother was sick in Guadalajara. I went down there to be with her, and she was sick a long time, and finally died. I stayed with her the whole time. I couldn't live with myself if I didn't. When I got back to this country, the jobs were gone. But I'd do it again. Every once in a while I meet one of those guys who offered me the jobs, and they just shake their heads. That's because they don't understand how it is with us.

You ask about this business of macho. That's like being very manly. It means different things in different parts of the country, but I'll try to give you an idea. In the first place, it means, "Nobody is going to boss me around. Nobody is going to tell me what to do, unless I want to do it." And particularly, it means, "No woman is going to wear the pants in my family." Now, in the second place, it means, "You'd better not say anything about my mother." There's a Spanish expression, which I won't repeat, but anyway, it's the strongest insult. If anybody says that about somebody else's mother, it means a fight to the death. In the third place, it means "I can take a dare." Let's say a man is all pooped out after a hard day's work, and is lying down on his bunk. Another guy comes along and says, "Let's go out and get a few drinks." The first guy says, "Naw, I'm too tired." The second guy says, "What's the matter, you chicken?" Then, the first guy has to go, or else es no muy macho. Finally, you can say that it means you just don't give a damn -- your're tough; you don't care what happens to you, or to the other guy; you can beat somebody up, you can even kill him; it doesn't make any difference. I would say this business of being macho has a definite relation to health. Let's say a guy is picking oranges. He gets a cramp in his belly. He says, "I better go to the doctor." Another guy says, "Aw, come on, let's finish this row." The sick man may work all day, and end by keeling over. But he doesn't want people to think he is a sissy. That's how it works. In the class of people you find among the braceros, you will find most of them have this idea -- son hombres; son machos.

Having lived for many years in ~~xxxxx~~ Ciudad Juarez, and then for moreyears in El Paso, I can say a word or two about the way the braceros live in Texas. Everyt ing is better here in California. The ~~xxx~~ food is better. The housing is better. The wages are better. Now, in Texas, you will find some pretty good, some not so good. But more are not so good. In California, it's the other way around.

I've seen the men passing through Juarez by the thousands, by the tens of thousands, by the hundreds of thousands. I can say for a fact that they have to pay mordida. I know it. I know some of the men who are getting the payoff. I have talked to them about it. I have said, "Is this a democracy? Why do you let things like this go on?" They say to me, "You've just had too much education." That's the way it is. That's what's wrong with Mexico. People like that don't want to see the people improve...

It wouldn't be so bad if Mexico was a country doomed to poverty -- if Mexico was nothing but a big, broad stretch of dry fields where nothing would grow. You listen to some people talk and you think maybe that's the way things really are. But I know better. Mexico is rich -- one of the richest countries in the world. She's got everything under the ground she could ever need, and enough to supply a lot of the rest of the world. It's never been touched. And as far as growing crops is concerned, why, the possibilities are almost unlimited. That's why it breaks my heart to see the people so poor, and nothing being done about it. Things could be so much better. Altogether different. Sure, change is taking place slowly, bit by bit, but I am not patient enough to wait.